Why engage in co-production of public services? Mixing theory and empirical evidence [1]

Carola Van Eijk and Trui Steen
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Abstract

Through processes of co-production, citizens collaborate with public service agents in the provision of public services. Despite the research attention given to co-production, some major gaps in our knowledge remain. One of these concerns the question why citizens engage in processes of co-production of public services. In this article, a theoretical model is build that brings the human factor into the study of co-production. The model explains citizens' engagement in co-production referring to citizens' perceptions of the co-production task and of their competency to contribute to the public service delivery process, citizens' individual characteristics, and their self-interested and community-focused motivations. Empirical evidence from four co-production cases in the Netherlands and Belgium is used to demonstrate the model's usefulness. The academic and practical relevance of the findings, and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Points for practitioners

Governments seek ways to engage a broad range of citizens, especially as only a limited number of citizens respond to government's initiatives to involve citizens. Insights about citizens' engagement are tested in four cases: Client councils in health care organizations for elderly persons and in organizations for disabled people, representative advisory councils at primary schools, and neighborhood watches. Practitioners can learn more about what drives citizens to engage in co-production. This enables them to improve their methods of participant recruitment.

Keywords

citizens' motivations, co-production of public services, health care, neighborhood watches, primary schools

1. Introduction

Both in practice and scholarship, attention for *co-production* is growing (Alford 2009; Pestoff et al. 2012). Citizens collaborate with public sector professionals (the 'regular producers') in service delivery processes, with the aim to enhance the quality of the services produced (Parks et al. 1981). They may take part at the invitation of government, or take the initiative themselves. Although governments are seeking ways to engage a broader range of citizens, only a small number of citizens respond to such initiatives (WRR 2012). Knowing why some citizens are willing to actively take part in the co-production of public services while others do not, can help to improve the methods of participant recruitment and the design of co-production processes. Although research on co-production of public services is growing, little is still known about what drives citizens to participate in co-production. This paper aims to decrease this gap in theoretical and practical knowledge by answering the research question: *Why do citizens engage in the co-production of public services?*

Because the insights on citizens' motivation in the co-production literature are limited, we develop a theoretical framework that builds on insights from different streams of literature. Next, we present qualitative data derived from three cases in the Netherlands – i.e., client councils in health care organizations for the elderly, representative advisory councils at primary schools, and neighborhood watches – and a

fourth case in Belgium concerning user councils in health care organizations for disabled people. The data are used to further strengthen the theoretical model.

2. Towards a theoretical explanation of what prompts citizens to engage in co-production of public services

Meanings of the term 'co-production' differ widely. In line with Bovaird and Löffler (2012: 39), we argue that the concept reflects many different activities (e.g., co-planning, co-prioritization, co-managing, co-delivery and co-assessment) that together aim at the engagement of professionals and citizens in the commissioning ánd provision of public services.

Despite many studies in the field, we know little about what drives individuals to engage in co-production. This paradox can be traced back to the focus of current literature, which typically describes interactions at the (inter-)organizational level. Citizens' motivations to co-produce are merely discussed theoretically, and empirical research is even scarcer; although for scholars to better understand co-production processes and for governments to address a broader range of (potential) co-producers more insight into this topic is essential. This paper wants to contribute to that need.

Since a straightforward theory to empirically test is not present, we refer not only to the co-production literature, but also to insights from related fields of interest,

such as political participation and volunteerism. Integrating these literatures into one model (see Figure 1), we identify three sets of factors that we expect to be important to one's willingness to engage in co-production: (1) perceptions of the co-production task and competency to contribute to the public service delivery process, (2) individual characteristics, and (3) self-interested and community-focused motivations. In the sections below, we discuss the different elements step-by-step. After that, we present the results of a first empirical test of the model. These results provide input for further research, and as such can foster the development of a theory on citizens' motivations to engage in co-production.

<<Insert figure 1>>

2.1 Socio-psychological factors for engagement

Citizens' decision whether to engage in co-production can be seen as different steps on a 'decision-ladder'. People cannot pay attention to every topic and every potential way of involvement, and are often engaged in an ad hoc manner. Studies of citizen participation, for example, find that political involvement depends on a specific problem and is limited in time (Verhoeven 2009). Thus, a first step on the decision ladder concerns the *salience* of an issue. Salience refers to citizens perceiving a topic as important enough to consider active engagement and weigh the investments of efforts.

'Personal salience' depends on the individual's perception of how the service affects him/herself, family, or friends (Pestoff 2012). 'Social salience' is the perceived importance of the issue to one's neighborhood, community or even society at large. Salience helps explain interest in less ad-hoc, longer-term forms of co-production in social services, such as those involving childcare, education, or preventive and long-term health care (Pestoff 2012).

A second step involves considerations about the efforts necessary to engage and the potential results. Weighing pros and cons, four different – but interrelated – considerations stand out: Ease, internal efficacy, external efficacy, and trust. *Ease* refers to the efforts required to become active. If more efforts are needed, this decreases the likelihood of involvement. This relates to issues such as the distance to the service provider (Pestoff 2012). Additional to transaction costs, ease also refers to perceptions about the simplicity or difficulty of the task.

Related to ease is 'internal political efficacy', a concept used in political science literature to understand voting and other political behaviors. It refers to "beliefs about one's own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics" (Craig et al. 1990: 290). In the context of co-production, *internal efficacy* refers to citizens' feelings of personal competence to understand and participate effectively in the delivery of the service at hand.

Citizens not only consider their personal competencies, but also the potential results of their engagement. 'External political efficacy' is another political science term that refers to "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands" (Craig et al. 1990: 290). So, in the context of co-production, a third step involves considerations about *external efficacy*: 'Does government, as regular producer of public services, provide room for my interaction, and if so, will my interaction matter in their decision-making and service provision processes?'

Most likely, answers to these questions are based on personal experiences; similar to how worthiness of supporting (democratic) institutions is judged (Ariely 2013). Crucial element, herein, is quality of bureaucracy, since people face representatives of bureaucracy more often than they engage in political activities. As such, *trust* in the public sector or government is also affected by this judgment of the quality of bureaucracy (Ariely 2013: 752). We expect that the extent to which citizens trust government**[2]** and, especially, the extent to which they feel government to be responsive, will influence their willingness to engage in co-production processes.

In short, as shown in Figure 1, we expect citizens' judgment about salience, internal efficacy, and external efficacy to be important factors explaining their engagement in co-production. These perceptions relate to the apparent ease of the task and the trust in the regular producer. The feedback loop in our model indicates that we

expect that, once engaged in co-production, individuals make an assessment of their actions and that this affects further engagement.

2.2 Socio-economic variables and social connectedness

In the domain of political science, *socio-economic variables* are found to be important explanatory variables for citizen behavior. Differences in electoral turnout can be explained by differences in gender, race, incomes, and levels of education of individual citizens (Timpone 1998). For citizen-initiated contacting of public officials, socioeconomic variables like income and education are of influence (Sharp 1984), while levels of income and education, and professional position help explain volunteering (Dekker and Halman 2003). However, we should take into account that the typical profile of the co-producer might differ from that of the active citizen engaged in political participation or volunteering. Bovaird et al. (2012), for example, find that women are more involved in individual co-production than men, although this gender effect disappears when collective forms of co-production are considered.

Where one lives might also matter in determining engagement in co-production. Citizens in socio-economic homogeneous neighborhoods are found to be less active (Oliver 2001). Likewise, the number of neighborhood initiatives can help explain who takes part in co-production (Thijssen and Van Dooren 2016). This refers to the importance of *social connectedness*: The environment in which you are living and the

networks in which you are engaging. For example, church attendance, group membership, and marital status are found to influence the decisions made by individuals (Amnå 2010; Timpone 1998) and the extent to which social capital is developed (Putnam 1993). Networks can be a constraining factor for participatory behavior – e.g., when deciding how to balance between family, work and society – yet, they also expose people to opportunities for participation. Contextual opportunities, such as being asked to volunteer, play an important role (see Steen 2006). Paradoxically, research indicates that the busier people are, the more they come into contact with opportunities to volunteer and positively respond to these (Brown 1999). Finally, the dynamics between networks and trust should be considered. In order to function effectively, networks need high levels of trust among its members. However, the more intimacy among its members, and the higher the level of trust, the larger the risk people start to distrust others outside the network (Fledderus et al. 2014: 436). This can constrain engagement in other networks and activities.

As shown in Figure 1, we expect individual characteristics, including both socio-economic variables and social connectedness, to impact on the variables discussed earlier (i.e., internal and external efficacy, ease and trust). In other words, the perception variables are – to some extent – fed by more 'objective' factors like education and being part of a network.

2.3 In-between self-interest and community-centered motivations

Fellow-feeling with other citizens and identification with public purposes can encourage citizens to self-organize (Alford 2012). Literature discussing individuals' commitment to political participation, volunteering, or self-organized collective action, refers to this as altruistic or *community-centered motivations*. Volunteers are found to hold an ethos that includes the belief that individuals hold responsibility to contribute to the common good (Reed and Selbee 2003). We expect that people with a higher orientation towards society are more likely to judge participation in co-production processes as salient and to consider the opportunities for engagement.

Deeper insight into the dynamics of community-centered motivations is offered by the rapidly expanding Public Service Motivation (PSM) literature (cf. Perry and Wise 1990; Perry and Hondeghem 2008). One stream links PSM – an orientation towards the public interest – with 'citizenship behavior' shown by (public service) employees both inside and outside the workplace. Employees with a high level of PSM not only put emphasis on their role within the organization, but also emphasize their responsibilities and duties as citizens when interacting with others outside the office (Houston 2008; Organ 1988). In the words of Pandey et al. (2008: 91-92; emphasis added), "(…) PSM actually represents an *individual's* predisposition to enact altruistic or pro-social behaviors *regardless of setting.*" Thus, we expect that a higher level of

PSM increases the likelihood that a citizen wants to take up his/her responsibilities in the public domain, and engages in the co-production of public services.

However, the literature on volunteerism points out that engagement may be based on *impure*-altruism: While doing good for others, citizens gain personal rewards, such as developing new competencies, making social contacts, or gaining a feeling of personal fulfillment. Co-producers are often users of the service or benefit from it in another direct way (Verschuere et al. 2012). It is not strange, therefore, that within the co-production literature different types of *self-centered incentives* are identified: Material incentives (money, goods or services), solidary incentives (rewards of associating with others, such as group membership), expressive incentives (the sense of satisfaction of having contributed to attaining a worthwhile cause), intrinsic rewards (enhancing one's sense of competence), and avoiding sanctions resulting from legal obligations (Alford 2002).

These self-centered motivations should not be perceived as negative *per se*. Engagement in co-production is not limited to the direct beneficiaries of the services only; e.g., in social services family members, relatives, friends or neighbors help attain better services for persons in their direct environment. Similarly, the pursuit of self-interest can also be collective, when an element of common benefit is found. In collective action specifically, collective self-interest is pursued through achievement of common goals that are impossible for unorganized individuals to attain (Pestoff 2012).

To conclude, as shown in Figure 1, both altruistic and self-interested motivations help explain why individuals co-produce. We expect motivations to be of relevance especially when explaining whether citizens' attention is directed towards co-producing activities, since motivations determine how willing people are to reach their goals and what is important to them (Locke and Latham 2002; Latham 2007), and which decisions should be made in concrete situations (Tasdoven and Kapucu 2013).

In sum, our model posits that socio-psychological factors (i.e., perceived salience, ease, internal efficacy, external efficacy, and trust), socio-economic variables and social connectedness, and self-interested and community-centered motivations work together to influence one's decision to participate in co-production. In the following of this article we compare this model with empirical data. First, we specify our research method.

3. Qualitative data collection

We provide a first test of the model using empirical evidence from four different cases. In the Netherlands, we investigated citizens' engagement in client councils in health care organizations, representative advisory councils at primary schools, and neighborhood watches. In Belgium, we studied user councils in health care organizations for disabled people. These four cases allow us not only to compare

between countries, but also between cases within a country. The health care and primary schools cases are similar in terms of tasks and responsibilities of co-producers. These cases substantially differ, however, from the case of neighborhood watches; e.g., with regard to the nature of the services produced ('hard' vs more 'soft' services), the role of government and society in the delivery process (services produced by public organizations solely vs traditionally including involvement of semi-public and civil society organizations), the actor initiating the co-production process (bottom-up initiated by citizens vs top-down regulated by law), and the aim of the co-production process (actual service delivery vs quality improvement through providing input for management). Before describing the cases and the data, we briefly describe the method used.

The co-production literature merely discusses citizens' motivations, and empirical evidence is scare; therefore, a survey is not the appropriate method to test our model at this stage. With a survey, all variables need to be included beforehand by the researcher; eliminating the possibility of finding other variables of relevance. For that reason, we looked for a method that would allow co-producers to express their own viewpoints. Focus groups have the advantage of making it possible to get better insight in citizens' personal motivations, attitudes and perceptions, while keeping the discussion as close as possible to respondents' perceptions and language. Also, the 'risk' of getting social desirable answers is minimized. However, because of the small

N, conclusions cannot be generalized (Vandenabeele 2008; Vaughn e.a. 1996; Morgan 1998).

<<Insert table 1>>

For each case, we organized two or three focus groups, dependent on the number of respondents included in a focus group (see Table 1). In the case of representative advisory councils in schools, both parents and professionals took part in the focus groups.**[3]** Since we are mainly interested in parent members, the total number of respondents is larger than for other cases. In the Belgium case on client councils, the total number of respondents is high too, since communication with the mentally disabled residents was difficult and required additional data collection.

The design allowed in-depth insight into citizens' viewpoints. Respondents were invited to talk about their participation and their motivations to engage in particular co-production activities. In a relaxed and spontaneous atmosphere, the respondents talked about issues relevant to them. Since we were interested in their opinions, we did not use a comprehensive list of questions but started from a general question: 'What are your motivations for taking part in this activity?' When discussion in the group broke off, we used a more specific question, such as 'what are the responsibilities of [the co-production process]' and 'what do you think of [something a respondent said before]'.

The discussions were recorded and transcribed word-by-word. To analyze the data, we filtered and coded statements from the notes.

4. Giving the floor to co-producers

For each case, after a short case description, we present findings on tasks, efficacy, salience, motivations, past experiences (feedback loop) and other issues raised by the focus group participants. Using verbatim statements from the focus group discussions, this provides a general overview of the issues and concerns raised by our respondents. In the next section, we discuss these findings and connect them with the theoretical model.

4.1 Dutch client councils in health care organizations

Since 1996, Dutch health care organizations are obliged to have a client council. Patients, spouses or other family members, voluntary care givers, and even neighbors are involved. The council deliberates the organizations' management and quality of the care provided. By law, client councils are provided with the rights of information, consultation, approval and investigation (Overheid.nl 2012a; Rijksoverheid 2011).

Different perceptions exist regarding the tasks and needed capacities. Some respondents argue they are not familiar with client councils or health care in general, but

do not feel concerned about this: ‘During membership, knowledge and experience will grow.’ Other respondents argue that knowledge, experience and skills are important: ‘You should not think your membership is nothing special.’ Experience in and knowledge of health care are mentioned most often, followed by being familiar with reading policy documents and working with computers. One of the respondents refers to her job: ‘I am familiar with being in meetings.’ Being active in other voluntary organizations is also perceived as being supportive to the role as co-producer. Through this, respondents have learned to be helpful or gained managerial experience.

Many respondents mention that previously they were neither aware of the existence of client councils, nor of its tasks and responsibilities. After a family member being resident in the organization or a member of the client council told about it, they wanted to know more, became interested and then decided to become a member. With their membership, they hope to represent the residents’ interests and to ‘do something good for the organization’ to which they feel committed. They want to solve problems and improve the quality of the services. A respondent being a resident herself says that she not only wants to receive care, but wants to give something in return: ‘I not only want to live here but also want to do something useful.’

The commitment with the organization is almost entirely based on oneself or a family member being resident, however. When the family member passes away, commitment often declines. One respondent is still a member of the council, although

his relative passed away. ‘But I get less and less information about what is going on and since I do not have the commitment anymore, I experience to be less motivated to stay in the council.’ The implication is that membership is often resigned and when the council is not able to get (enough) new members, this can threaten the conveyance of information.

4.2 Belgian user councils in health care organizations for disabled people

Since 1990, clients are involved by law in the management of health care organizations for disabled persons in Belgium. Via user councils, mainly family members (the guardians) but also residents themselves take part. The members are elected for a period of four years. They hold the responsibility to represent all clients, ask questions, and give advice. Some decisions cannot be made by management without permission of the council. In practice, however, most issues dealt with by the council seem to be of a very practical nature (e.g., material that needs replacement), rather than concerning major issues in policy or management of the organization (Vlaanderen.be 1990; VAPH 2009; GRIP 2009).

Notable, although not surprising, is the difference between residents and parent members. The mentally disabled residents who take part in our focus groups have no well-described idea about the tasks and responsibilities of the user council. It is more an opportunity to meet people and to build friendships: ‘I like it because it is so cozy.’ The

parents, instead, find it important users' interests and opinions are incorporated in the organization. Since their children are not able to fully participate themselves, they engage in the council as guardians 'in their children's name'. This is also reflected in the skills perceived necessary. While residents do not consider this, parents do so explicitly. For them, the user council is an opportunity to learn and to use the experiences and capabilities developed elsewhere. Skills developed in their job, combined with their users' interests and the insights of other respondents, allow them to take initiatives 'that cannot be taken by management'.

Parents taking part in client councils do not seem to have any doubts about their engagement. 'You just do this; that is normal.' They perceive it as a responsibility to their children and part of their role as parent. Their membership is also an opportunity to meet 'parents in adversity'. Also they receive information via the council, e.g., on financial issues. Additionally, they want to improve the contact between residents and management, and between residents themselves. Only some observe a more negative atmosphere when considering the relation with the management. This is also the responsibility of co-producers: 'If you start picking at them, this will not be pleasant to them.' Most respondents feel their engagement is useful, and find this important since 'if you can improve the total, your child is doing fine as well.' There is a large interdependence between being motivated for the well-being of their child and serving the general interest. However, parents do not want to represent their child's interests

solely. ‘One should not reflect the interest of one’s own child; one should reflect the general interest and keep the broader picture in mind.’

4.3 Dutch representative advisory councils at primary schools

Representative advisory councils at Dutch primary schools, formalized in 1981, consist of members elected out of and by the employees and the parents/guardians. Their main task is to deliberate with the school board about all relevant issues, including finances, (voluntary) parental contributions, teaching methods, time tables, and educational improvement and reforms. The councils are provided with legal rights of information, advice and approval (Overheid.nl 2012b; Ministerie van OC&W 2011).

The respondents have clear ideas about their tasks and responsibilities. They want to control and critically judge the school’s policy and management, and perceive the council as an instrument to get support for and legitimize decisions made by the school board. The council has a broad responsibility in society, not limited to education only: ‘It should build a bridge among different groups in the local community.’ Respondents want to improve contacts among parents, and between parents and the school. One respondent finds that parents often are very critical towards the school but ‘do not want to be engaged in or do something for the school.’ It should be the councils’ task to stimulate a more active attitude. Reasons why other parents are not active,

according to this respondent, are: lacking time, not feeling competent, differences in cultural background, and lacking acquaintance with participation.

Feelings of competency are considered. One respondent argues that professionals should make the decisions ‘because I do not have the necessary knowledge and experiences.’ Others do not agree. They got involved because of their (perceived) competencies. ‘I have become a member because they were looking for someone with experience.’ ‘Unconsciously, people who become a member share certain competencies.’ Competencies perceived needed are knowledge of rules, ability to read (financial) policy documents and capacity to consider policies on a longer period of time.

One respondent argues that having influence is not the reason for his participation: ‘I just want to help school.’ This opinion is not shared, however, by other respondents: ‘I have become a member to have a say.’ Yet, the actual influence is perceived to be small. Perceptions differ from ‘I hope the school board will use our input’ to ‘the director decides’ and ‘I think this job is thankless’.

Nevertheless, the respondents like their role as co-producer, are ‘proud’ and feel emotionally committed. Some respondents perceive this commitment to be entirely linked to their own kids: They participate to ensure their child has the best education possible. Others argue that ‘you are doing wrong if you are a council member because

of your own children only.' 'You are a member of the community, receive benefits from that and should also invest efforts to improve education and society.'

4.4 Dutch neighborhood watches

Neighborhood watches co-deliver an outcome (safety and a 'livable' neighborhood), rather than plan activities or provide input for management. They collaborate with police and municipality and are organized at the local level, without prescriptions by (national) law. Often, citizens themselves take the initiative. The co-producers' tasks range from taking part in telephone circles to active patrolling the neighborhood. Municipalities support citizens, e.g., through education.

The respondents hold different perceptions about their responsibilities and tasks. Some argue they 'only have to support a livable area', while others perceive themselves to be 'the police's eyes and ears' or argue the neighborhood watch is an instrument to build cohesion within the community. Respondents share the opinion that job or personal background are far less important than holding skills to communicate, judge the (human) character and be unafraid.

Developing these skills is an important motivation for some respondents. The courses facilitated by municipalities make this possible. Another motivation broadly shared relates to social factors. Respondents appreciate the contact with other members and people in general: 'They know me because I am a member of the neighborhood

watch and when we meet later on they strike up a conversation with me.' Others focus on youth hanging around on streets. The respondents like to hear their story, and inspire them. Some respondents get self-confidence out of their role as co-producer: 'Elderly in particular acknowledge I am doing well for community'. The patrol clothes worn strengthen the idea of doing something important.

Other respondents are motivated out of dissatisfaction with the current situation. They want to have a safe environment and want their children to be able to have a night out safely. A burglary nearby can be a direct reason to engage in the neighborhood watch. Some respondents engage out of dissatisfaction with the police who they believe are not able to respond on time and in an appropriate way. Other respondents have a more nuanced understanding: Because of austerity in public finances, the police and citizens must work together. 'Pressure on government is increasing and then you want to take up your responsibility' and 'you have own responsibilities as well for the safety in your own environment.'

Co-producers work in close collaboration with municipality and police. As a respondent says: 'Police cannot do without neighborhood watch and neighborhood watch cannot do without police.' They share information and citizens need police protection when facing troubles during patrols. However, respondents stress their independence since this eases contacts with youth. The collaboration with the police is judged diversely. Some members are very positive: 'The collaboration is very good and

the municipality is glad we are doing this'. Others feel collaboration could be improved by receiving more feedback about how the police deals with the information received from the neighborhood watch. Almost all respondents feel their 'job' is useful: 'we achieve results' and 'we make a difference'. As one respondent said: 'When there are no incidents anymore, why should I continue my membership?'

5. Discussion: Connecting empirical data and theory

Connecting theory and data, it is interesting to see which variables derived from the interdisciplinary approach are validated by the cases and what new elements, not included in the theoretical model, pop up.

Based on the data, *salience* can indeed be seen as starting point of a citizen's consideration about whether to engage. The only case were salience was not explicitly mentioned is that of the representative advisory councils in primary schools. It seems that in general, parents are aware of the councils' existence. In the case of Dutch health care organizations, several respondents explained that at first they were not familiar with the existence of the client council, but after learning about it, they started considering participation. How this attention is placed on the possibility of becoming a co-producer differs, yet it is often through family or a council / neighborhood watch member.

On the second rung of our model, we placed internal and external efficacy, trust and ease. *Ease* is not explicitly mentioned in the four cases. Respondents from client councils and advisory councils mention it is important to have enough time available. This can be approached as a 'transaction cost' but makes the definition of the concept of ease rather limited. In contrast to the other variables in the theoretical model that relate to individual characteristics or perceptions, ease is more about the characteristics of the field in which co-production processes take place. With the exception of neighborhood watches, citizens' input is required by law in the cases studied. This might imply that the co-production process is institutionalized and facilitated in such a way that ease becomes less of a question. *Internal efficacy* was mentioned in all four cases. Respondents who are member of a representative advisory council argue that many parents might not take part because they feel incapable. The co-producers who do take part think they certainly need some skills to do so. This is also strongly visible in both health care cases. The co-producers mention skills developed during paid jobs or voluntary activities, and argue that through the council they use these knowledge and skills in order to do something valuable and improve the quality of health care.

External efficacy was also mentioned in all cases. The respondents feel the council allows them the opportunity to change the organization and control management. Through the council they have a voice within the organization. In the case of neighborhood watches, respondents feel they have the opportunity to collaborate with

the police to solve problems and contribute to the community. The final variable defined on the second rung in the model is *trust*; operationalized as trust in the 'system' perceived when deciding about whether to engage. This is not validated by the cases, however. None of the respondents mention trust in the organization or in professionals as part of their decision to engage. However, what they do mention is the trust they hold once they have become a co-producer. In all four cases, the relationship with the professional (i.e., management or police) is mentioned. And, as expected in the model, this is strongly connected with the consideration of external efficacy. In both health care cases, respondents find it important that the management is open and willing to listen to their ideas and concerns. This is also true for the representative advisory councils, although here co-producers seems to have a more 'natural' critical attitude. For neighborhood watches, trust mainly means that information is shared.

Based on the theoretical model, we expected individual characteristics (i.e., socioeconomic variables and social connectedness) to impact on internal and external efficacy, trust, and ease. *Socio-economic variables* are mentioned in both health care cases and the advisory councils. Respondents mention that they make use of skills developed in other volunteering activities or paid jobs. Based on these three cases, we might conclude that socioeconomic variables only relate to internal efficacy: Because of the skills developed, the respondents argue they feel capable to become a co-producer. Links with external efficacy, trust and ease are not mentioned. *Social connectedness* is

mentioned in the cases of Dutch client councils and representative advisory councils, however not related with the variables on the second rung. Instead, respondents say how their network (family, people being co-producer already, people they meet during other activities at school) made them aware of the possibility to engage or stimulated their interest in the organization and its management. *Being asked* is an important incentive to take part. This suggests that social connectedness might be related with salience. In line with our model, we found that networks can also be constraining; e.g., not having enough time available. Or as one participant in a neighborhood watch says: 'People around me question why I am doing this'.

According to the model developed, motivations impact on salience. *Self-centered motivations* are mentioned in the cases of representative advisory councils, neighborhood watches and user councils. However, self-centered motivations are not mentioned in a negative way. They refer to aspects as developing oneself through courses, feeling acknowledged or meeting other people (who are in the same situation in the case of user councils). The latter links with the 'coziness' that is mentioned by some respondents in these three cases. Egoistic motivations such as representing the interests of oneself or ones family are rejected by almost all respondents. Your commitment with the organization might be based on a family member, but once you are a co-producer you should consider the general interest.

Community-centered motivations are mentioned in all cases. Co-producers find it important that interests of all clients are heard, quality is improved, communities becomes more livable, and that they can help in times of financial constraints. 'Community' is defined in a narrow way: The organization and the direct environment co-producers are living in. Co-producers want to improve education in one particular organization or make their own area more livable. When a family relative who is resident of a health care organization dies, commitment declines and so does the motivation to stay a member of the council. Thus, although respondents argue they want to take up their responsibility 'as a citizen', their actual engagement seems to be more related with specific interests at a lower level. Based on the data, we cannot establish whether both types of motivations indeed impact on salience; nevertheless they have a role in co-producers' engagement.

Interestingly, we found four other elements to be impacting on salience. First, *networks* turned out to be important: In both health care cases, it is often through family members or a person who is a member already that respondents became aware of the possibility of engagement, feel committed, and perceive the council to be something relevant and important. Second, except for the case of representative advisory councils, *actual problems* play a role. Citizens see things going wrong or face troubles themselves (e.g., a burglary) and become aware they can contribute to the solution of these problems. Third, and related to the former, except for the client councils, respondents

take part because they *want to know what is going on* in the organization. A role as co-producer provides the opportunity to get information directly from the management. Fourth, in the case of neighborhood watches, *feelings of anxiety* are mentioned as ways by which attention is put upon the possibility of engagement. Respondents have feelings of dissatisfaction and then decide the neighborhood watch is a way to do something with these feelings: 'You should not complain but do something and help the police.'

Finally, we expected a *feedback-loop*. Respondents' decision to continue their engagement is indeed influenced by their experience. They reflect on how their input is used, how the relations with the management and colleague co-producers are, and if they still feel committed to the organization or not. When their family is no resident/student anymore, often the commitment declines.

6. Conclusion

Integrating insights from different fields of research, we assumed three sets of factors to impact on citizens' decision to engage in the co-production of public services: 1) perceptions of the co-production task and competency to contribute to the public service delivery process, (2) individual characteristics in terms of socio-economic profile and social connectedness, and (3) self-interested and community-focused motivations. Insights from focus group discussions in four co-production cases confirm the

theoretical expectations to a large extent. However, we also find that some variables are interpreted differently by respondents, some new elements can be added to the model, and differences exists between types of co-production.

Explanations for citizens' engagement differ between the case of neighborhood watches and the other cases studied. Particularly difference is found for 'trust', which might be explained by the dependence existing between regular producers and members of neighborhood watches. Also, this case points out a new element: Dissatisfaction as a motivation for engagement. The feedback-loop seems stronger in the case of neighborhood watches. These respondents clearly focus on the output delivered, while this seems less important for respondents taking part in councils. A possible explanation is that co-producers' engagement within councils feels less like a choice: As a parent or family member you have to do something.

Differences between cases in citizens' viewpoints, expectations and the conditions under which they expect co-production to hold potential, might also be traced back to the co-production design and characteristics of the policy sector itself. Following Bovaird and Löffler (2012), we used a broad definition of co-production. This, however, means that citizens' involvement varies among cases. Neighborhood watches substantially differ from our other cases. While neighborhood watches entail citizen-initiated co-delivery, the councils in health care and primary schools are examples of institutionalized co-planning and co-management.

During the focus group discussions, citizens' motivations and incentives to take part were discussed. The method allows us to keep an open mind and to keep the discussion as close as possible to citizens' perceptions. However, particularly due to the limited scale, the method is not representative for the larger population of co-producers. Because of this, the method is less useful to get a full insight in variables (e.g., 'socioeconomic characteristics') or the way the variables are related. Further research, preferably using survey material, is necessary to test the model in a more extensive way.

The study provides useful insights into citizens' motivations to engage as co-producer in the delivery of public services. This contributes to the current stage of the literature, as empirical research only recently starts to take off (e.g., Van Eijk and Steen 2014). The article can serve as starting point for further research. Related to the above mentioned limitations of this study, further research – both quantitative and qualitative – is necessary to strengthen and further develop the theoretical model. Including other policy domains and countries in which co-production processes take place in the research, can help deepen insight into different motivational patterns across distinct types of coproduction. An additional step for research would be to use these insights on citizens' motivations to investigate how these motivations impact on the collaboration between citizens and professionals.

Finally, the study has practical relevance given the increasing interest in co-production, which is related to austerities in public finances and the current legitimacy crisis in both the public sector and market. The (public) debate on citizen co-production is mostly driven by ideological stances towards the role of government and civil society, and less by an (empirical) understanding of the motivations for involvement in the joint production of public services. Having a better insight into citizen engagement is crucial for developing tools to raise commitment of citizens as co-producers and for enabling collaboration between citizens and professionals.

Endnotes

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[2] Yang (2005) shows the importance of this relationship the other way around: Public administrators' trust in citizens helps explain citizen involvement efforts.

[3] The underlying study on citizens' motivations is part of a larger research project that also studies professionals' perceptions on co-production. Therefore, in the case study of primary schools, both parents and professionals were included in the focus groups.

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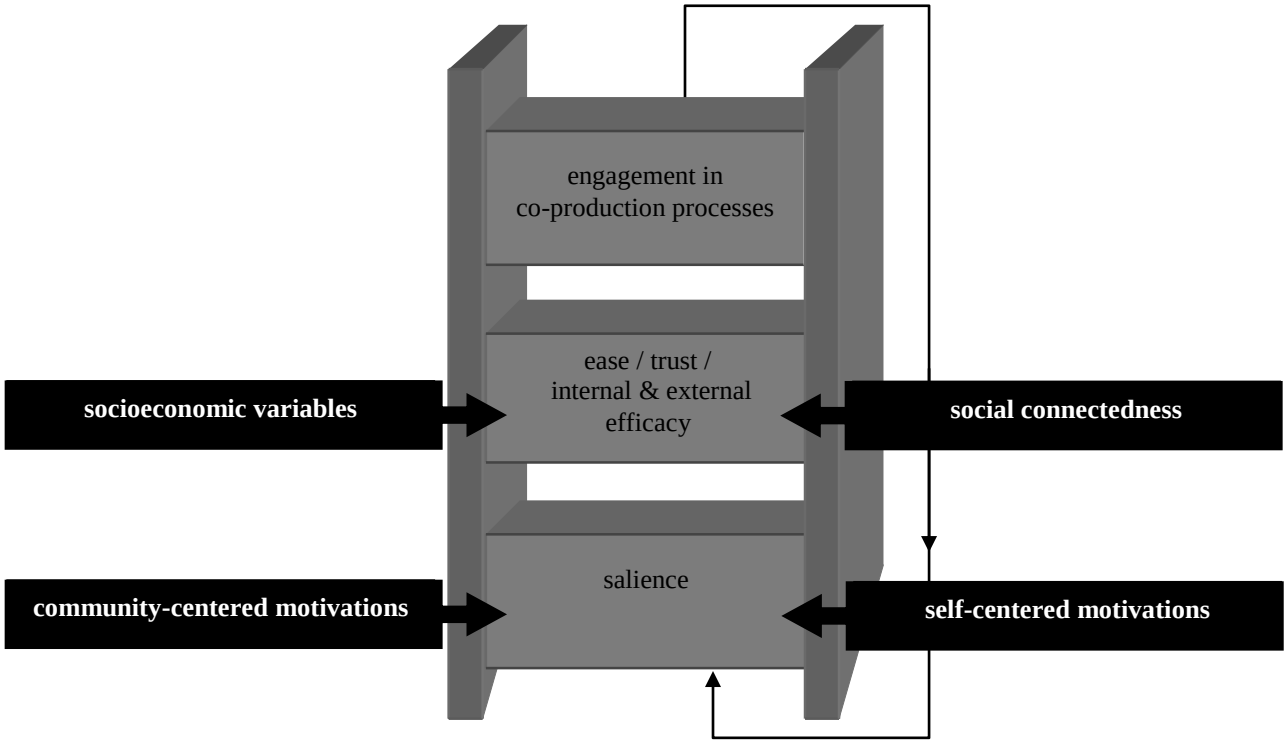
Tables

Table 1 Overview of focus groups and respondents

Case	Number of		Type of respondents included
	focus groups	**respon-dents**	
The Netherlands			
Client councils health care	2	6	Members of councils: (ex)voluntary care givers, residents, family members of residents
Representative advisory councils primary schools	3	20	Members of councils: parent members, employee members, board members
Neighborhood watches	2	10	Active patrol members, an organizer of telephone circles, a chairman, a policeman
Belgium			
Client councils health care	3	19	Members of councils: parents of disabled residents, residents

Figures

Figure 1 Theoretical model to explain citizens' motivations to take part in co-production



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Biographical notes:

Carola van Eijk is PhD-student at the Institute of Public Administration, Leiden University.

Trui Steen is Associate Professor at the Institute of Public Administration, Leiden University and the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute.